



## What do I need to know before adopting?

**What is your rescue organization all about?** NEW HANOVER COUNTY RABBIT RESCUE OF WILMINGTON is a 501c3 non-profit organization. ([nhcrabbitrescue.org](http://nhcrabbitrescue.org)) We serve many functions but at adoption events we are House Rabbit Educators (experts in rabbit care) and we teach House Rabbit Society (HRS) material which is a national organization with global outreach. HRS spends an exponentially amount of resources not only in Veterinary research but socialization, behavior, and the correct types of diet, and housing. New Hanover County Rabbit Rescue of Wilmington; Inc like House Rabbit Society will **not** adopt out rabbits that are going to live in a small animal cages, hutches, or be housed outside under **no** circumstances.

**Why rescue rabbits?** Rabbits are the 3rd most popular companion animal in the USA second to dogs and cats – unfortunately though they are very misunderstood, neglected, abused, exploited, and have less people advocating on their behalf. There are many rescues for dogs and cats out there and very few of them that are dedicated towards helping rabbits. Many of them are not well funded as most of all the resources and pubic donations are given to the dog and cat rescues instead. In addition, domestic pet rabbits do not enjoy same amount of protection in the eye of the law that cats, and dogs have because often they are overlooked and mistakenly categorized as “livestock” when in fact they are companion animals and small percentage of the rabbits out there are legitimate farm animals. Rabbits are overbred by breeders for profit in the pet industry, resulting in unregulated backyard rabbit mills that would otherwise be shut down if they were doing the same thing with dogs and cats. Because the government looks the other direction with many of these breeders simply because they mistakenly believe that rabbits are “livestock” not companion animals. Domestic rabbits deserve so much more recognition as being the 3<sup>rd</sup> top pet in our country and they deserve the same protections from government agencies and animal welfare groups.

**Where do you get your rabbits from?** We partner with municipal animal shelters across the state of North Carolina. Our number one mission is to get the rabbits out of the public shelter system because people that work there really do not have the knowledge needed to properly care for rabbits or screen the potential adopters. Many shelters just want to get rid of the rabbits and give them away for free or have adoption fee's as low as \$3 which caused the wrong type of clients coming in to get the rabbits. For example, that attracts the breeders that want to breed them to sell the babies, the hunters that use rabbits to train hunting dogs, and those who feed rabbits to pet snakes. I know for a fact that this was going on in shelters. The President of this organization worked at a municipal animal shelter and saw this going on. That is the reason this organization was founded was to stop the exploitation of pet rabbits that are



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in the animal shelter system. The rabbits that we pull are abandoned rabbits, some injured and ill that require Veterinary treatment before we can spay and neuter them to adopt them out. We pull the high-risk rabbits from shelters that were cruelty cases, surrendered by owners, found as strays, and abandoned. We are so busy pulling rabbits from shelters, we rarely have any space to take in private owner surrenders. In 2018 we took in more than 130 rabbits this fiscal year and adopted right under a 100.

**Does your child want you to adopt a rabbit for them?** If you have a child that wants a rabbit as a new pet – We ask that both of you need to do some research on [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org) prior to adopting as we want to make sure that a rabbit is the right choice for your home. Knowing that ultimately it's you as the parent's responsibility to make sure that all of the animals in the home are being provided for adequately. Even if your child fails to care for the rabbit as they originally promised you to do. The reason this is so important is usually the rabbit will become your pet and you need to be okay with that. Often it is not a matter of *if* it happens but *when* - which is completely normal because children get busy with school, friends, sports, and life in general.

**Do rabbits make good starter pets?** Rabbits are very misunderstood animals. Unlike popular belief, they do not make good starter pets for children. Children have a hard time making a connection with a rabbit because they are slow to warm up to them. It is the nature of a rabbit to make the human work hard to get their affection and attention. Rabbits typically only bond to ONE person (which is usually the one that feeds them and shows them the most attention). Children usually lack the patience required for bonding with a rabbit, which in turn makes them no longer interested in them after the holidays or special event has shortly passed.

**Are rabbits good with children?** Rabbits have an array of different behavior types. We do assess our rabbits prior to adopting them, which helps match your family with the best rabbit that is suited in your existing home environment. But even with this - sometimes rabbits and children are not always a good match because rabbits are prey animals and are easily frightened of loud noises (especially screaming children). Since they are prey animals, they do not like being picked up and carried around or chased – When something picked them up it was going to eat them, so their instincts are to be afraid of heights. In addition, rabbits are very fragile animals with delicate bones. They can easily get injured by being mishandled by children. Depending on your child's behavior around the rabbit - and your child's age should all be considered when determining whether a rabbit would make a proper pet in your household. Rabbits do better with children that are relaxed, laid back, patient, and somewhat quiet. They do best with children that are attentive to the needs of the rabbit and understands that they are not a toy, and that they like being interacted on their level, which means they do NOT like being picked up and carried around like a doll or child's toy. They do not do well in



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homes with loud, energetic, busy households with a lot of chaos. They also do not do well with children that have behavior disabilities that would make them prone to having fits of rage or frustration that could cause the rabbit to be frightened or injured by accident. All these things should be considered before adopting a rabbit and bringing a rabbit into your home.

### **If the rabbit we adopt from your organization does not work out, will you take it back?**

Yes, but we will not refund you. We will always take our rabbits back. Our adoption contract requires you to return the rabbit back to our organization because we do not want our rabbit ever posted on a free site like craigslist where they are highly exploited for food. Not only that, but even if you gave your rabbit you got from us to a friend – what if that friend posted them on craigslist? Just because you don't know about it does not mean it will not happen! Think ahead of all things before you adopt! Because rabbits are over populated since breeding has been nationally unregulated (unlike dogs and cats) once we adopt them out to new owners it is very hard to get back into rescue for preventable circumstances such as “your child is no longer interested in the rabbit”. That is why we push you to research and do your homework before adopting a rabbit. Because we are the only rescue in our area and serve a large portion of the state of North Carolina - There are always rabbits in need that we are pulling from partner shelters that have been either abandoned, abused, or neglected that immediately need our help. While we will always take any of our rescues back if need be - and our focus is not to help the public rehome unwanted rabbits but help those at great risk that are in the shelter system. We serve the public by educating them to care for the rabbits properly for their lifetime so that we have less rabbit's being abandoned and in the shelter system. For all these reasons, we want you to make sure that you as the parent are okay with becoming the primarily care giver of the rabbit once we adopt it out to your family for the LIFE of the pet. Please take the adoption very seriously or do not adopt at all. Our adoption contract is a legal binding contract.

### **Are you looking to adopt a rabbit as a child's birthday**

**present, Christmas gift, or Easter gift?** Also taking in consideration the primary reasons stated above you as also *wanting to adopt a rabbit for your child*; then you by now probably know that animals as gifts is not a good choice because animals are a lifetime commitment and they have a lifespan of 10-12 years. You now know that as the parent that *you* will likely become the primary care giver of the new pet – statistically speaking. Most rabbits that are bought as gifts – fail to be long term. We do suggest instead of gifting a rabbit as a “gift”, instead give your child a homemade “gift certificate” to pick out a rescued rabbit from the shelter - after the holidays or occasion has passed. This insures that the child can be present and part of the adoption process. Many times, when we (adults) pick out the animal for another person



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the one that gets the animal fails to have that lasting “connection” which plays a role in a failed adoption.

### **Are you a teacher wanting to adopt a rabbit for your**

**classroom?** Rabbits are often seen as low-maintenance pets or teaching tools. Sadly, many people’s perception of what rabbits are like is based on erroneous assumptions and experience with neglected classroom or backyard pets. It’s common to see rabbits sitting all day (and night) in a small classroom cage. True, unlike many species, rabbits can endure such a life quietly for a surprisingly long time. But rabbits need exercise and stimulation to maintain health, good spirits, and normal behavior. A constantly caged rabbit becomes withdrawn and aggressive, resulting in symptoms such as lethargy, unresponsiveness, obesity, or neurotic behaviors. Within a few years, most rabbits confined in such as setting become ill and die. That’s not a normal life span. With proper care, domestic rabbits can live 10-12 years or longer. If no one makes a significant investment of time, attention, and care of a classroom rabbit, the result is a withdrawn animal who does not have much to give back to the students. Regardless of what teachers or parents believe about the care of a classroom animal, what do such practices show students about the value of living beings? Shelters are often overflowing because of the common perception of animals as objects to be passed around, cared for only when it’s convenient for people to do so, then abandoned when they become too much of a bother. For this reason, our organization cannot adopt a rabbit to be used as a class pet. We want our bunnies in homes that offer the best possible environment that a classroom **cannot** provide.

### **Are you wanting to adopt a second rabbit as a companion for**

**your rabbit?** If you think your rabbit is lonely you can try to bond your rabbit with a companion rabbit. But before you even think about it there are some major things you need to consider. Is your existing rabbit spayed or neutered? Do you have the space to set up a second “home base”? Do you have the room to move your rabbit to a new area your rabbit has never been before during the bonding period? Have you considered what if the bonding fails; are you prepared to keep two rabbits in separate spaces? Have you researched bonding techniques? Are you aware that once you bond your rabbit to another rabbit the human becomes less important than before? Sometimes its not a bad idea to get a second rabbit but bonding can be very difficult to do, and a lot of thought should be taken before you take that leap of faith. Because rabbits are very territorial you need to understand that you will have to completely change up you existing rabbits’ area and routine because you must make him/her equally uneasy as the new rabbit that will be coming into a new home. Secondly, your existing rabbit **must** be spayed or neutered.



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Lastly, you want your rabbit to have some input in picking out his/her new buddy. Never attempt to do it without doing an initial meet and greet bonding session prior to adopting. You will be surprised to see the variety of ways that your rabbit will interact towards different rabbits - some good, some not so good. Let your rabbit pick its roommate. Would you want your parent to pick up a strange kid up from somewhere - and then bring them home and tell you that this new kid gets to live in your bedroom with you, and play with your toys? It's the same concept.

### **Why is it important that I prove my other rabbit is already spayed and neutered before bonding my rabbit with another rabbit?**

Because both rabbits should be equally neutral (non-hormonal) before attempting to bond rabbits. Rabbits can fight viciously, and this fighting can result in death. Intact males can harass a spayed female who does not appreciate the sexual advances - so both sexes regardless of male/female should always be fixed prior to bonding them. Before we will adopt another rabbit with your rabbit - for the safety of both rabbits, we will require you to show proof of spay and neuter before we do a meet and greet.

**What if I want to adopt two rabbits at the same time?** If you are looking to adopt two rabbits to start with that is better and less work for you to do. You do not have to get two separate set ups or worry about moving the rabbits to a neutral area during the bonding process; so if you think two rabbits is right for you – it is best to adopt them already as a bonded pair. Two rabbits are not really any more work than having one because you still must dump the litter box, and feed daily; so if you have the right set up it will be no less work for you. The only downside is that bonded rabbits always are more bonded to one another than they are to a human, so you need to understand that and be okay with that.

**Is bonding two rabbits difficult to do?** Yes, it is. Please research bonding techniques on [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org) before even considering doing this. We can also help consult you if you have any questions on techniques – but like HRS we cannot make any promises that it will be 100 percent successful.

**What should I expect as a new rabbit owner?** Rabbits can make great house pets. Unlike popular belief they *are* very clean animals, especially once they have been spayed and neutered. Rabbits are creatures of habit and once they set up a daily routine, they do not like it to change. Rabbits are active animals that require a lot of exercise and space to play. They like to run and jump (binky) when they are happy. Caged rabbits never get to enjoy life and you never get to see their personalities blossom. This is the reason is why we are so against the concept of caging a rabbit.



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**Why is spay and neutering a rabbit so important?** The very first step of having a great house rabbit starts with spay and neuter. The reason that spay and neuter is very important is because rabbits that have not been spayed and neutered usually have behavior issues that are due to hormonal imbalances. The females tend to be aggressive and protective of their space and have what we call “nesting behavior”. They become protective of their personal space and will bat and bite at hands coming at them to pet or touch them. This happens because the mother’s instincts are to protect the nest from all invaders and your approaching hands are a threat. Approaching hands are invading their space – even if the intent from the human was just to pet the rabbit and give affection. Spaying them usually gets rid of this unwanted behavior within a few months after spaying them. With time the females usually chill out and become well-mannered bunnies. In addition, both males and females will spray urine and mark when they are intact much like an unaltered cat will. Unneutered male rabbits - like dogs that are not neutered can tend to be sexually frustrated and do a lot of humping behavior that can be quite annoying at best. Because of these unwanted behaviors are reasons why owners surrender rabbits – we make sure to spay and neuter all our rabbits prior to adopting them out. Another benefit of spaying and neutering is that they become easier to litter train and the urine does not smell as strong as it did prior to surgery. This makes them very clean unlike popular belief rabbits are clean and tidy animals. Lastly, the final benefit of spay and neuter is they both have less chances of developing cancer. Intact females that are older than 3 years old that have not produced a litter have a great chance of developing uterine cancer and will die before they reach 4-5 years old. Intact males also have a greater risk of testicular cancer which can shorten their lifespan.

**How do you make a rabbit be a house rabbit?** Since we spay and neuter and litter train them – we also teach adopters how to house them indoors correctly where they become like any other house pet (dog/cat). We teach a cage free method that of course is a goal that you can work towards – after the adjustment period. It’s much like crate training a puppy but we do it without a crate or cage. The rabbit must earn its freedom and it’s done in stages. We will not allow our rabbits to be housed in restrictive small animal cages as it is not only inhumane but goes against everything that we teach the rabbit (good litter habits) as the cage becomes the litter box when using those cages. We do not even want the cages to be used at all because it confuses the rabbit – and it causes you to have more to clean which is not necessary.

**Why should I not let my rabbit play outside in the grass? I see wild rabbits are on the grass all the time.** Because domestic rabbits do not have the same instincts that the wild rabbits have – they can eat plants that are hazardous to them and not know. In addition, the pesticides on the ground are



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toxic, not to mention that the parasites in North Carolina are ridiculous. Outside rabbits in our region are often ridden with mites and mange. There are four types of mites that can affect rabbits, and some are contagious to humans. They can also get bitten by bot flies where they lay larva under their skin which is called “fly strike” or “warbles”. There are many worms on the ground that effect rabbits such as pin worms, round worms, tape worms, hook worms, and whip worms. Also, fleas and ticks are also a huge issue in our area. Rabbits are sensitive to medicine and some flea treatments can kill them – so if your rabbit has mites or fleas you must consult with a Vet before putting any topical treatment on them. Secondly, rabbits do not tolerate the heat well and in our region often die of heat stroke. In the cold, they can catch upper respiratory infections that can result in death. Last, but not least, rabbits are prey animals so everything wants to kill and eat them. Because they are domesticated, they do not have any fear of other animals and a stray dog, stray cat, or any wild animal they will allow to approach them. Hawks will come swoop down and take the rabbit right in front of you. Hawks are prey animals of opportunity and they have been known to grab small dogs out of yards right in front of owners. You are sitting right there watching your rabbit in the yard is not going to stop a hawk from grabbing your rabbit. Finally, wild rabbits have a life span of less than 3 years simply because they are prey animals, and everything eats them. That is why rabbits are geared to reproduce so quickly – it is to protect their species from extinction. Domestic rabbits have less instincts that wild ones so they are even more vulnerable than even a wild rabbit.

**What is the proper type of set up you require?** The proper set up for introducing a house rabbit to your home starts with what we call “home base”. Home base should be in a family area where the rabbit has plenty of interaction with everyone (not out of sight out of mind). Home base is a safe place that is not restrictive that your rabbit can spend the day while you are at work. It keeps the rabbit safe from chewing walls, cords, and getting into trouble while you are unable to Supervise them during “free roam” playtime. Home base is 4 feet by 4 feet area that has plenty of space for the rabbit to move freely, and play, even while you are at work. You should have plenty of room to place toys, tunnels, card board boxes and other stuff to keep your rabbit happy, busy, and content while you are at work. Home base consists of what is called an X-pen or exercise pen. It should be about 4 feet by 4 feet area and the exercise pen should be METAL and a minimum of 36 inches in height. It is very important that the height be at least 36 inches as rabbits are jumpers and anything less will not contain them. The exercise pen also must be metal not plastic as rabbits chew plastic! Also, important to please be aware that not all metal 36 pens on amazon.com are safe to use with rabbits **so cheaper is not always better!** The cheaper ones tend to be made of flimsy metal that bends. The metal should not bend at all. If it does your rabbit can get injured and we recommend you to send it back and do not use it. Walmart.com has decent brand are affordable and that are sturdy. Okay brands that we trust are Midwest, Top Paw, You



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and Me, Daskocli, and Aspen. Also, when buying online keep in mind you want one with a large walk through door (for a person to walk in) so avoid any with just doors the animal can go through but you can't. You want to be able to walk through this pen to be able to sit down with the rabbit and clean (sweep and mop).

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## What can I do to prepare the rabbits “home base” before I bring the rabbit home?

We do recommend that for the bottom of the pen you build a base platform that consists of a sheet of plywood, and sheet of vinyl flooring from Lowes or Home Depot. The reason we recommend this flooring instead of "carpet" or a rug is that if they miss the litter box you see it - and then you can move the box to the corner you rabbit prefers. You want good habits before you allow him/her free roam. Like a puppy they have to be consistent and clean prior to allowing free roam time. Otherwise you are asking for trouble. Also, the plywood and vinyl provide extra protection for your floor and adds a moisture barrier so that the rabbit does not do any damage to your flooring while adjusting his litter box habits. Once a rabbit establishes an area where it goes to the bathroom it will always go back.



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An example of the what the base of an exercise pen “home base” should look like.

**How are you able to litter train a rabbit?** Litter training a spayed and neutered rabbit is easy. We immediately introduce them to a litter box as soon as we take them in at the rescue. We want the rabbit to distinguish that a litter box is where they go to the bathroom. Placement of the food and hay helps ease this process. Knowing the behavior of a rabbit helps this because usually where a rabbit eats (when they graze) they also poop. Placement of the hay in or above the litter box helps promote the rabbit to poop in the litter box. Peeing is usually a lot easier to train the rabbit because it is natural for them to want to pee in one place which is usually pick a corner. However, depending on your rabbit the corner that you placed the litter box may not be where your rabbit chose to go. You would simply monitor this and move the litter box where they are peeing. The litter box should be dumped at least 2-3 times a week.



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**What type of litter box do you recommend?** Another important aspect is the type of litter box you choose to use. While some corner boxes are great not all are equal. Depending on the direction that your rabbit sits to use bathroom will determine if the pee and poop misses the box or goes over it. Also, rabbits are natural diggers and if you use a shallow litter box with light weighted paper litter such as care fresh, they will dig out all the litter making a big mess for you to clean up. Pelleted paper based is heavy and super absorbent making it more difficult for the rabbits to dig in. We recommend you using a deep litter box because bunnies tend lift their butts when going to the bathroom – so the pee can't go out of the sides of the litter box. Specifically, we actually recommend you using a deep-dish pan (18-quart Sterilite brand dishpan) actually again found at Walmart for less than \$5.00. Just make sure you get the right size they have some shallow ones there too - so don't get them confused.

Home / Kitchen & Dining / Kitchen Storage & Organization / Sink Accessories



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**Is the type of litter I use important?** Yes again, rabbits tend to hate change so by continuing to use the same litter we already taught them to use will make it easier for you to have a clean and consistent rabbit – but there is also another good reason we recommend using what we use. We use a pelleted paper-based litter because the paper is nontoxic, and it absorbs the pee and the smell quite well. Most likely if you continue to use what we do and change the box at least 2 times weekly chances are you will not even know there is rabbit in the house. Because the rabbit's urine will not smell as potent since they are spayed and neutered – the paper pelleted litter also helps cover whatever odor there was. In addition, rabbits like to dig, and the heavy pellets discourage digging behavior in the littering box which makes your life easier and less to clean. **Most importantly, there are litters on the store shelves that are marketed for rabbits that are proven to be toxic and deadly for rabbits.** Those toxic



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litters are pine and cedar pellets and shavings. They cause liver failure and should never be used with a rabbit.

**Do rabbits like change?** No. They do not like change at all. Change in a rabbit's environment or routine or can really stress a rabbit – which can cause many different illnesses that can be costly - so extra care and caution should be taken to make sure when bringing a new rabbit home to let them adjust seamlessly and keep the stress at a minimum while they go through this adjustment period which usually lasts up to a week. For this main reason we want adopters to have the proper set up before adopting because we want the adjustment period to go smoothly as possible for the rabbit and not have to adjust more than one time. *Note: Please consult with us on what we consider to be the proper setup.* Other ways rabbits can react to change in behavior such as foot thumping or tossing empty bowls to let you know that they are upset or disapprove – or in worse cases they stop eating which will cause GI stasis a medical emergency.

**Do rabbits travel well?** No. If you travel a lot it is best to let someone you trust come house sit as rabbits do better that way than being boarded or moved. If you are going to be moving, please remember that you need to give your rabbit at least a week to reset and readjust before letting them come out and explore as they normally did prior to the move.

### **Does it matter what brand of rabbit pellet food that I use?**

Yes it really does matter. Most all brands of pellets are NOT good for rabbits. We feed them the healthiest diet possible and want you to continue to do the same. Again, since rabbits do not like change – and drastically changing the food they are used to can cause GI stasis and other gut issues that can cause you to have an unwanted emergency Vet trip and cause you stress worrying about your new pet rabbit. At the time of adoption, we try to teach you how to read the food labels and tell you the few brands that are good for your rabbit. There are more unhealthy ones on the store shelves than there are good ones, so it is very important that you learn to recognize the differences.

### **Should I buy supplies for the rabbit (food and litter) before I adopt the rabbit from your organization?**

No. However at the time of adoption we teach people how to properly chose food for them and believe it or not – not all the foods sold on the shelf for rabbits are good for them. We teach you how to



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navigate all of this and will show you how to read food labels at the time of adoption. *We do ask that you refrain from buying any food products or litter prior to adopting from us because as I mentioned many are not safe and we will teach you why and how to read food labels so that you are able to make good choices for your rabbit.*

### **Why is it important to research rabbits before you adopt**

**one?** Unlike cat and dog adoptions most people know how to properly care for them. We are at a disadvantage as mentioned earlier rabbits are very misunderstood and even many of them claim to know a lot about rabbits (as they cite have been previously owned one) but once we talk to them, we find out very quickly that they know very little which makes us uncomfortable adopting out a rabbit to those people. Please do a little extra research on your own at [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org).

**Where can I go to see your adoptable rabbits at online?** You can follow us on Facebook and check out our website on [adoptapet.com](http://adoptapet.com). We try to keep our adoptapet site as current as possible.

<https://www.facebook.com/NHCRRofWilmington/>

<http://www.adoptapet.com/new-hanover-county-rabbit-rescue-of-wilmington/>

**Where can I go to adopt a rabbit from your organization?** We generally hold adoption events every Saturday alternating between PetSmart New Center Drive, and PetCo off South College Road. We normally do not hold adoption events during the summer when school is out, and the last Saturday of each month. During the “off season” while school is out if you contact us and if you have done all your research and have the correct set up; we may be able to schedule an adoption appointment. We just will not hold an adoption event where we transport the whole crew due to lack of volunteers on the off season. If you have any questions you can also email us at [nhrabbitrescue@gmail.com](mailto:nhrabbitrescue@gmail.com) and we will get back with you as soon as possible.

### **How much does your adoption fee cost and what does it**

**cover?** Our adoption fee is \$120 which includes spay and neuter, microchip, proof of medical history, adoption packet with educational materials, toe nail trim, and card board carrier. Our adoption fee is lower than what it would cost for you to spay and neuter a rabbit on your own. The average cost for rabbit spays and neuters ranges anywhere from \$160-\$350 per rabbit. So, keep that in mind before getting that “free rabbit” from your friend that you will have to pay to get fixed!